Pickle

by Dylan Horrocks

MATURE READERS
NUMBER THREE
$3.50 CAN/US

40 pages

OF HAND-CRAFTED NEW ZEALAND COMICS – SPECIAL BUMPER-SIZED SUMMER ISSUE!

Pickle

Issue Number 3
January 1994

by
Dylan Horrocks
editor
Dolan Hicks (mrs.)
publisher
Michel Vrána

"The medium of exchange in the comics business is guilt; it's not money."

— Steve Englehart

Black Eye

PICKLE is distributed in New Zealand and Australia by Propaganda Distributors, PO Box 582, Auckland. Tel (09) 376-3078 and Fax (09) 378-1852. If your local bookshop, newsagent, record shop, cafe, (etc.) isn't stocking **PICKLE**, tell them to get it from Propaganda, and to get it fast!

PICKLE #3, January 1994, Published quarterly by Black Eye Productions, 338 Kribs Street, Cambridge, Ontario, Canada N3C 3J3, voice/fax (519) 658-0416. All characters, stories and art are copyright © 1994 Dylan Horrocks. Subscriptions to Pickle are $9.95 Canada/U.S. postpaid. Overseas, for Air Mail service, please add 50%. Canadian orders, please pay in US funds, all others, please pay in Canadian funds.

PRINTED IN CANADA

Letter from Hicksville

Dolan Hicks, Pickle, P.O. Box 5512, Wellesley Street, Auckland 1, New Zealand.

Dear Picklettes: Here we are again, and while up there in Canada Michel is trudging through the snow with boxes of PICKLEs, down here in Hicksville it's the height of Summer. These days, much of our time is spent sitting on the beach or enjoying barbecues and iced tea. Mrs. Doublets has opened last year's Summer Wine and the air is filled with the smell of roses. It's the season for haystacks and ice cream and bumper-sized Summer Specials, and so, in keeping with a time-honoured tradition, we've decided to do a special super-long Summer issue of PICKLE — 40 pages of hand-crafted New Zealand comics!

Michel tells me that PICKLE #1 has had some rather good reviews in the *Comics Journal* (published by that nice, polite young man Gary Groth). He also said that we've appeared on their "Hit List". Well, I can tell you, ever since Michel told me that, I've been in a state of barely contained panic! What on earth could we have done to deserve to be "rubbed out" as they say in 'Dick Tracy'?! Naturally, I phoned the police immediately, but they didn't seem overly concerned. They only said they'd look into this Groth fellow and check out whether he had any known associates in New Zealand. Mr. Hoskings who runs the petrol pump suggested we organise a campaign like that poor man Salman Rushdie has had to — visiting world leaders and so forth and asking for their support in persuading the*Comics Journal* to lift their death threat. For now, I think the best thing is for us to ask all our loyal readers to write to the *Comics Journal* and ask them ever so politely if they could refrain from killing any of us, please.

So far, we still don't have a winner for our current competition, so here's your chance to write in and win a free collection of New Zealand political cartoons! Just jot down the name and a few interesting bits about a New Zealand Prime Minister — past or present — and send them in. If you're at a loss, just invent one. Send your entries in to the address above. The regular contest corner, letters page and the "Hicksville Hit Parade" will all be back next issue.

Lastly, a little note for our New Zealand readers. Dylan will be teaching an evening class at the University of Auckland in April and May 1994 entitled: 'The Ungentlemanly Art - an Introduction to Comics'. It will cover the history of comic strips and comic books from their beginnings in eighteenth century caricature to the present. To find out more, write to Dylan, c/- PICKLE, or contact: Continuing Education, the University of Auckland, Private Bag, Auckland.

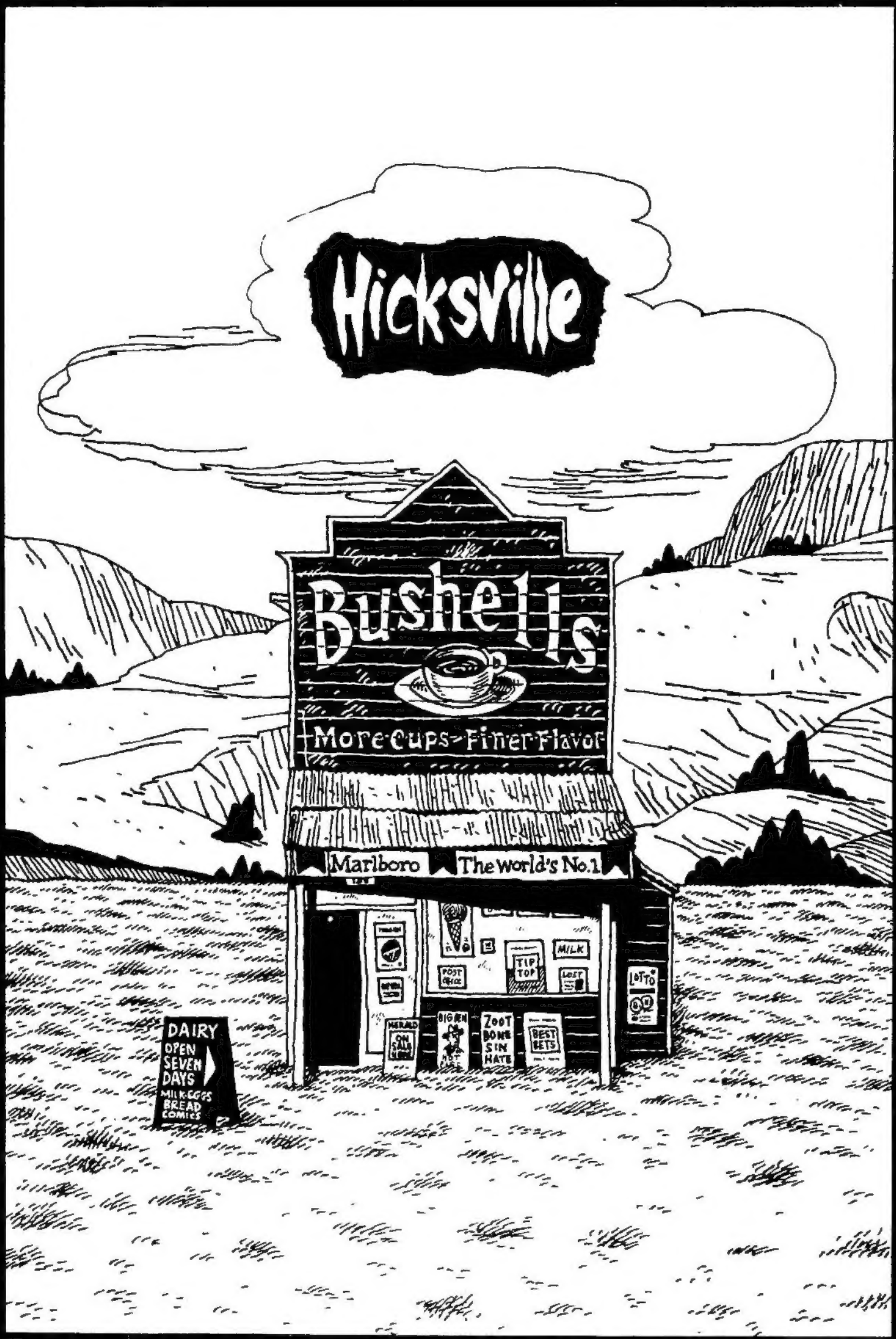
Well, that's all from me for this time round. I can only hope we're all still here in three months time for PICKLE #4, "Hit List" notwithstanding! Until Autumn (here) / Spring (there).

I remain affectionately yours,

Dolan Hicks

Dolan Hicks (mrs.), Editor

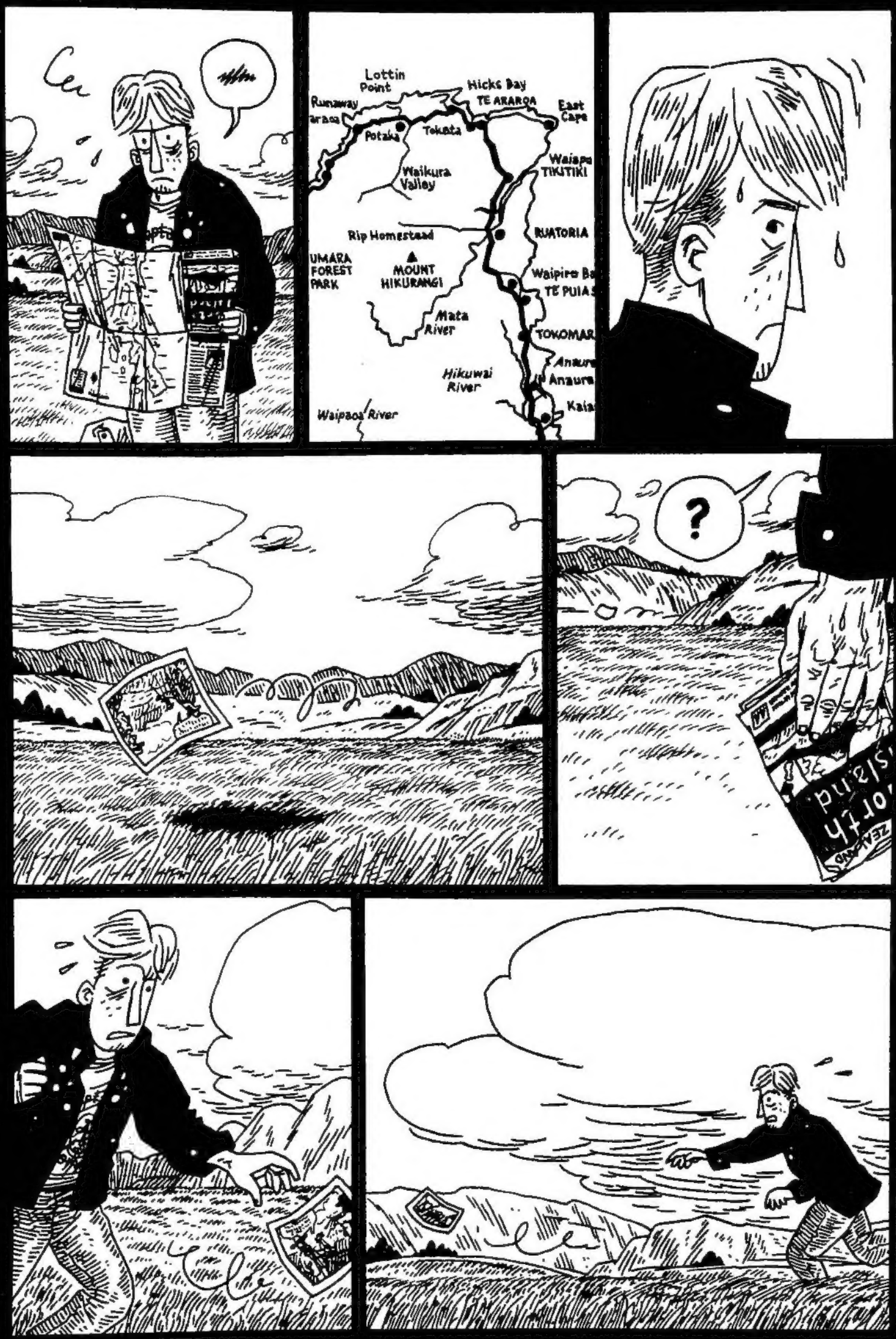
Special thanks to: Terry, Michel, Andrew Thurtell, Kelly et al at Mark One, Gilbert Wong, Tim Wilson, Roger Langridge, Pablo Velardes, Cornelius Stone, Les Cartoonistes Dangereuses, family and friends (etc. etc.). Dedicated to Peter Rees.


Hicksville
Bushells
More Cups - Finer Flavor
Marlboro
The world's No.1
MILK
TIP TOP
POST OFFICE
LOTTO
HERALD
BIGEN
ZOOT BONE SIN HATE
BEST BETS
DAIRY
OPEN SEVEN DAYS
MILK EGGS BREAD COMICS

bing
BONG
YES?
HI. I'M TRYING TO GET TO HICKSVILLE.
AMERICAN?
YES, I'M AMERICAN. WHICH WAY IS IT TO HICKSVILLE?
NEW YORK? WASHINGTON? IDAHO?
JUST AMERICAN...
PLEASE...
POPS!

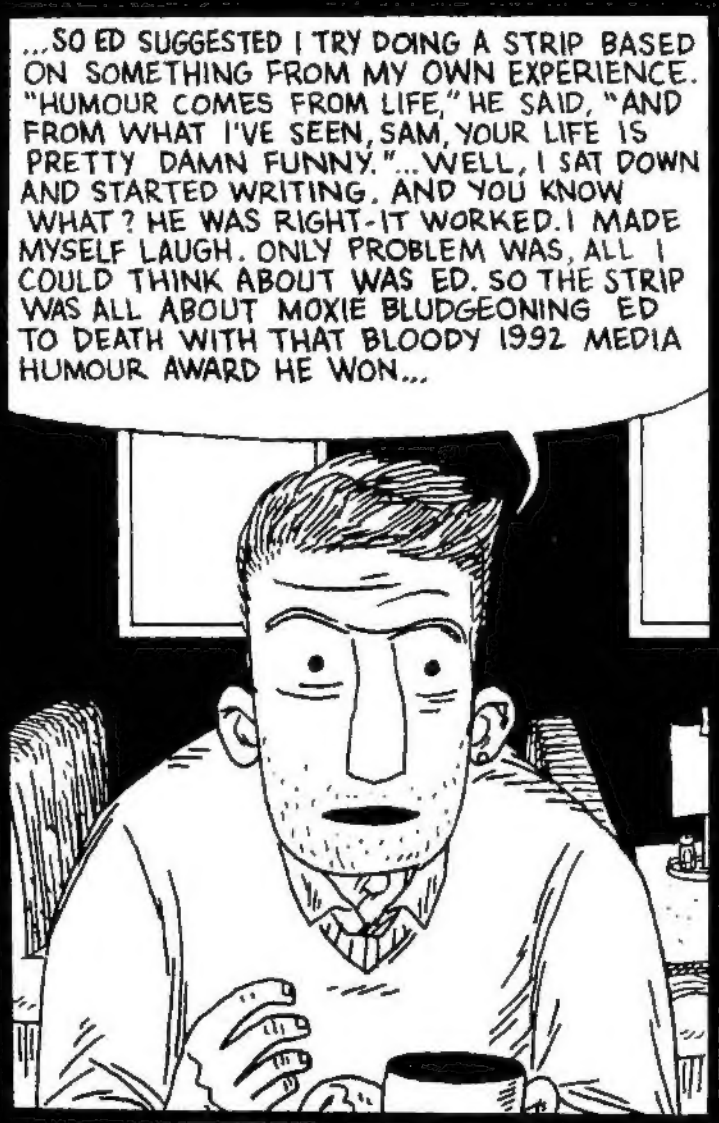
I'M TIRED, I'M JETLAGGED, I CAN'T FIND ANYTHING ON MY STUPID MAP – WOULD YOU PLEASE JUST TELL ME HOW TO GET TO FUCKING HICKSVILLE?
HICKSVILLE, YES?
YES. HICKSVILLE.
WAIT HERE.
VEGEMITE
HERE. HICKSVILLE. THREE DOLLARS.
FLOUR
Pickle
WHAT IS THIS? A GUIDE-BOOK OR WHAT?
Edmonds
THREE DOLLARS.
...
...
Pickle
...comic-shops.
Sexy SUPER CHICKS
Death Squad
Trendy
PUNKY GIRL
ULTRAK

Pickle
?
(Written & drawn on location
London, Belgrade & Paris.
Pages 2, 101 & 103 drawn by
Terry Fleming.
Dedicated to the usual crowd:
Terry, matt, family & friends, etc, etc,
& to:
Chloe Brooker-Kenworthy
Eddie Campbell
Glenn Dakin
Paul Grabett
Edward Pinsent
&
Fox Comics.)
Hicksville Press
Editor: Dolan Hicks (mrs)
Hicksville
New Zealand.
Sigh.
North


Lottin Point
Hicks Bay
TE ARAROA
East Cape
Runaway
Potaka
Tokata
Waikura Valley
Waiapu
TIKITIKI
Rip Homestead
RUATORIA
UMARA FOREST PARK
MOUNT HIKURANGI
Waipiro Ba
TE PUIA S
Mata River
TOKOMAR
Anaura
Hikuwai River
Waipaoa River
?

HA!
GOTCHA, YA LITTLE SHIT!!
GOOD DAY, GENTLEMEN. WOULD EITHER OF YOU HAPPEN TO KNOW WHERE WE ALL ARE, PERCHANCE?

THE RAREBIT FIEND

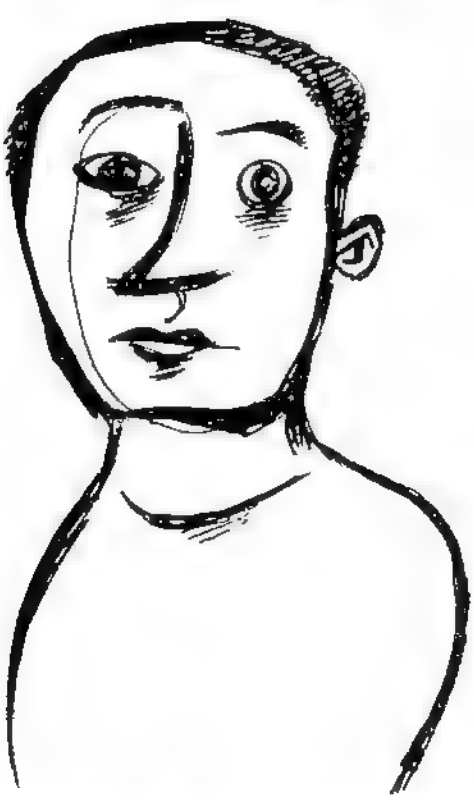

...SO ED SUGGESTED I TRY DOING A STRIP BASED ON SOMETHING FROM MY OWN EXPERIENCE. "HUMOUR COMES FROM LIFE," HE SAID, "AND FROM WHAT I'VE SEEN, SAM, YOUR LIFE IS PRETTY DAMN FUNNY."... WELL, I SAT DOWN AND STARTED WRITING. AND YOU KNOW WHAT? HE WAS RIGHT-IT WORKED. I MADE MYSELF LAUGH. ONLY PROBLEM WAS, ALL I COULD THINK ABOUT WAS ED. SO THE STRIP WAS ALL ABOUT MOXIE BLUDGEONING ED TO DEATH WITH THAT BLOODY 1992 MEDIA HUMOUR AWARD HE WON...

UNFORTUNATELY, ED DIDN'T LAUGH. INSTEAD HE FIRED ME. SO HERE I AM. BACK IN HICKSVILLE. BROKE AND UNEMPLOYED. BUT AT LEAST I'VE GOT MY SENSE OF HUMOUR BACK.
HA

HEY DANTON! GRACE IS BACK IN TOWN!
YOU'RE KIDDING!!
...
SMASH
IT'S TRUE! I JUST SAW HER COMING UP THE STREET!
=ahem.=
UH... HI, GRACE... er... HOW'S IT...?
HI, DOUGAL.
GRACE! WHERE THE HELL HAVE YOU BEEN
@#☆!
¡卐*
HI, SAM.
HI, DANTON.

Here Boy!
GET IN BEHIND!
STUPID BLOODY MONGREL!
FANGS
?
ZZZ
to Be Continued...

Pickle



The Last Fox Story.

— dylan horrocks
1990.

I crack this story one night while familiar friends sing familiar songs in my room, after an evening of talking about the Poll-Tax in a Harringay pub.

(Looking out the bathroom window, I catch a glimpse of a bright room, filled with red flowers and green plants).

This strip is for friends & for Fox. Written in a time of strange feelings and late nights.

It goes like this:

The Last Fox Story

or:

'How I Became Afraid of Comics.'

It all began with England, where I arrived in autumn; the skeleton-trees still wore their last leaves like an old skin.

I arrived with drawing-board & a half-drawn story, & plans for many more. My first night here I talked til late of net-working & page-rates, when I really wanted to be asleep.

I drew 8 pages in a week, & bought as many comics.

In a fortnight I'd seen cartoonists, publishers, and, of course ...

... comic-shops.

Big shops, small shops, shops like supermarkets & shops for eclectic tastes; french shops, japanese shops, bookshops with comics & comic-shops with books. None were as good as the one old shop in Auckland, but all wore the same smells - the smell of old paper in plastic bags. The smell of adolescence. The smell of artificial *hip*, and the smell of latex costumes over mutant muscle sweat.

And the leaves
began to fall...

As the stresses of emigration set in, I began to falter – I longed for home & a simple life, and the task of building a career began to seem too huge.

Old projects sat stilled inside the cupboard, while new stories took on a melancholy – a creeping doubt about what I was doing...

The Translator.

(working-title).

—I am in London, alone & without much money. I aim to become a professional cartoonist, but so far no-one seems able to understand my work.

—Then a sympathetic publisher* commissions me to translate a graphic-novel by a french cartoonist I've never heard of before: Claudine LeBlanc. The money is meagre, but I enthusiastically accept the job & take the book home to read.

*

– Les Nuits du Soleil.

(a knight lies dead in the snow, while his murderers loot his body)

I have never known such silence as when snow covers our valley.

Then there is no sound: no birdsong, no animal's cry, no music, no voices calling nor sounds of work or play.

Only the crunch of one's own feet in the snow; and then when one halts, there is nothing: only silence.

And then, so heavy is that stillness; so heavy and so terribly sad.

– It reads much better in french, but the book has me caught in its grip. I read it 4 times & then make the first draft in a small red notebook.

– The story:

– A knight is returning from the crusades & invites a friend to spend the winter in his family's castle. The friend has people to see first in a nearby town, & so the knight goes on ahead, eager to see his home again after so many years amid the horrors of war & the desert.

– But when he is only a mile from the castle, he is ambushed by thieves & murdered, & the gifts he had brought back are stolen. The thieves break a hole in the ice of a lake and dump his body into the deep water, where it is soon covered again by new ice.'

– A week or two later, the friend arrives & is surprised that the knight is not there. Worried, the castle mounts a search, but the wintry countryside reveals nothing.

– As winter deepens the friend becomes involved with the knight's sister, & they share their growing love and also their growing sadness at the knight's disappearance.

– Throughout, the dead knight's voice describes his longing for his home & family, and his memories of the crusades, as the scene of his murder is buried with snow, and then - slowly - the winter melts into spring.

– The ice is gone, & the lake is fresh and clear. Flowers blanket the grass where the knight died. He has left no sign. The lovers court & the world turns ...

– But there at the end, the author has repeated a phrase used once before in the book, which I do not quite understand. Or rather, I understand the phrase, but not its meaning, & I cannot think how to translate it into english.

– I try to ignore it, and begin work on the second draft. The work is much slower now. And always I keep returning to that phrase.

– I mention it one day to the publisher, whose french is even worse.

– "You can ask Claudine yourself if you like," he says. "She is visiting London in a week; I'll introduce you."

– And so we meet. She is twice my age, and reminds me of an Italian movie, but she's friendly and laughs at my french without making me feel stupid.

– I avoid saying how much I like her work, & she seems to appreciate it. She asks to see mine, but I'm too embarrassed.

– I wonder whether we'll have an affair, like in the Italian movie.

– When I ask about the phrase, she can't think how to explain it, and says she will think about it.

—In the meantime, we become friends; I show her London, & she spends hours in the museum & the manuscript room at the Library. We go for day-trips to the country...

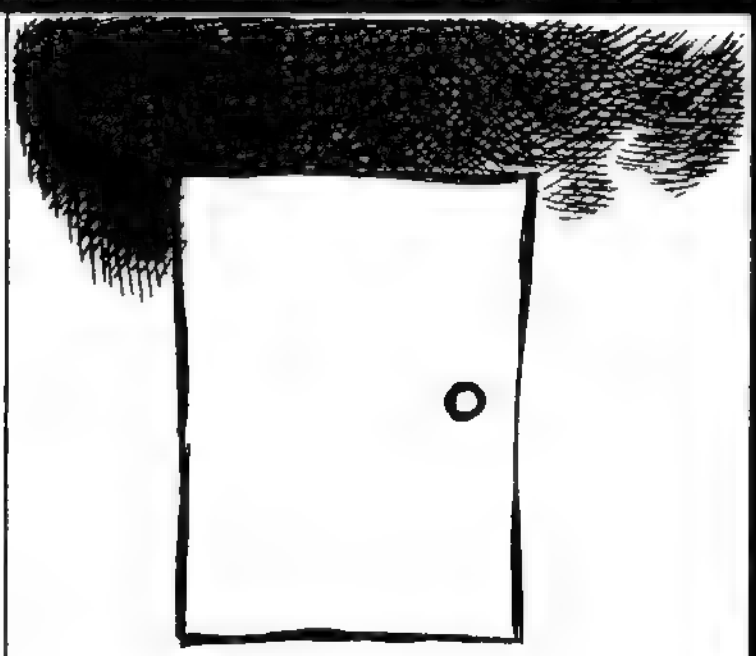
There the story faltered; I began to feel unsure of their relationship.

I had envisaged an affair: superimposed maps of London, Paris and Auckland; postcards from France; comics written for one-another. But now I wondered whether to keep things platonic...

Worse, though, was that problematic phrase. How could I find a phrase in french that was relevant, spoke some subtle wisdom, and yet could not be translated, nor explained by its author ?

I wracked my brains, but it was no good. I asked french people & they made hopeful suggestions. But nothing worked.

Into the cupboard !



Other stories crawled along, never getting far.

My portfolio underwent three months of constant reorganisation before joining everything else ...

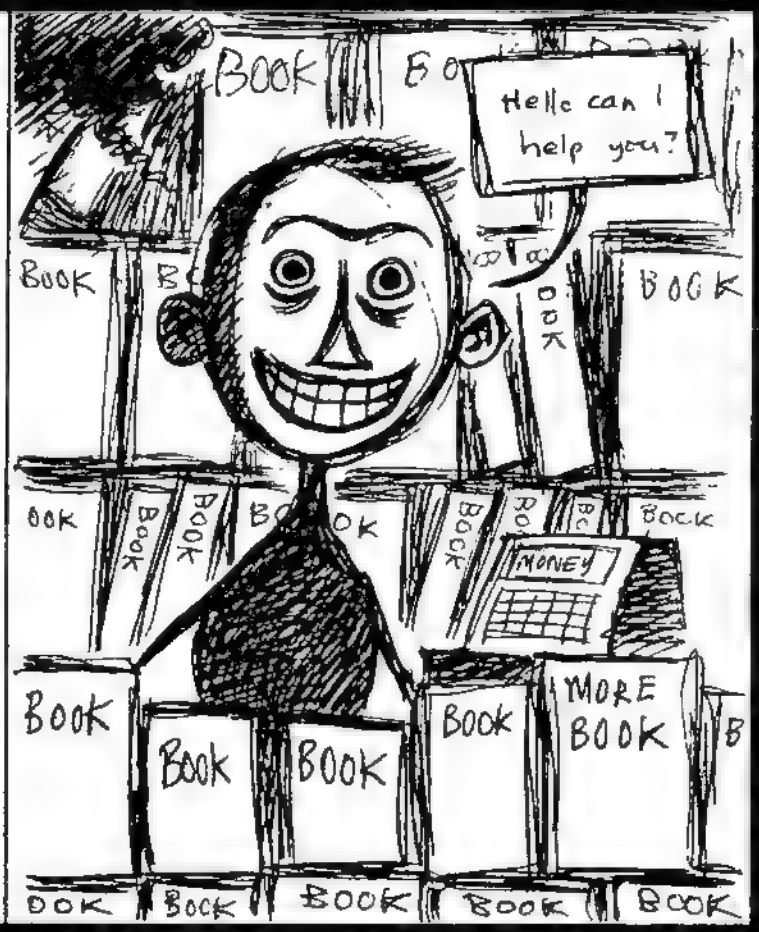
... in the cupboard.

...

Time passed too quickly.

Money evaporated.

I got another job in a bookshop.



Maybe I'm not a cartoonist, I wondered.

Maybe I'm a bookseller?

Deadlines faded away,
the cupboard stayed shut.

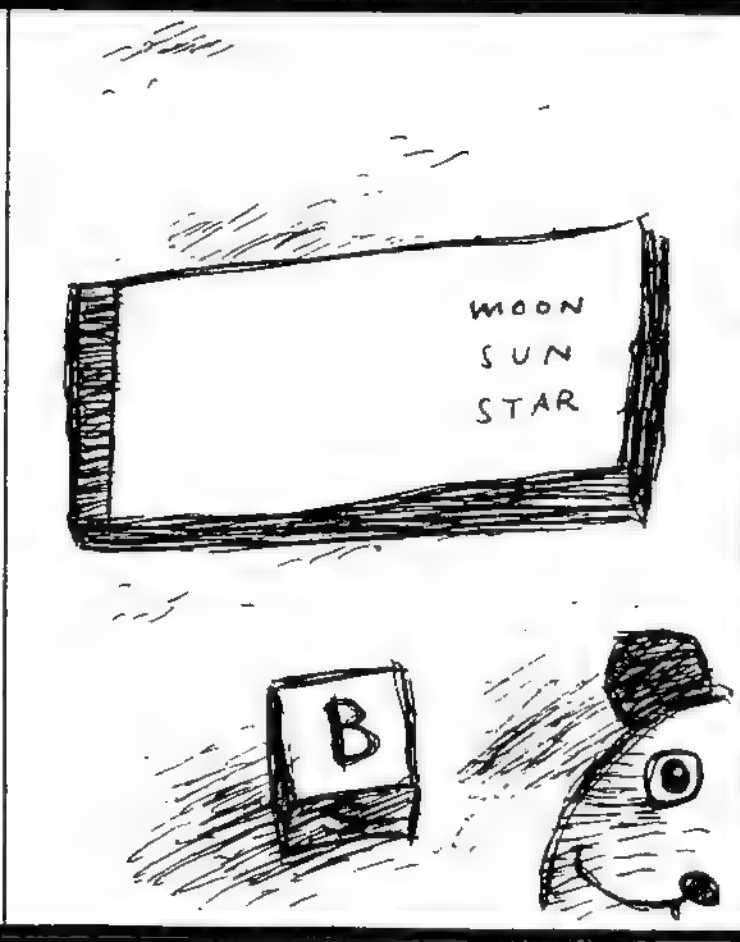
Contacts went unphoned,
prospects unpursued.

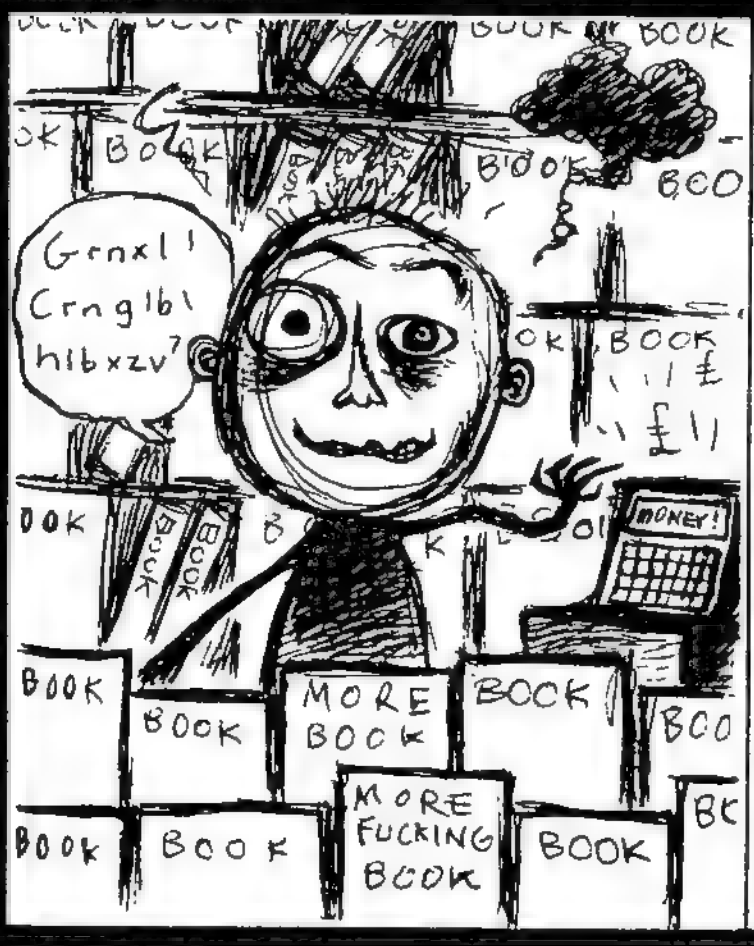
Comic-shops went unvisited;
comics went unread.

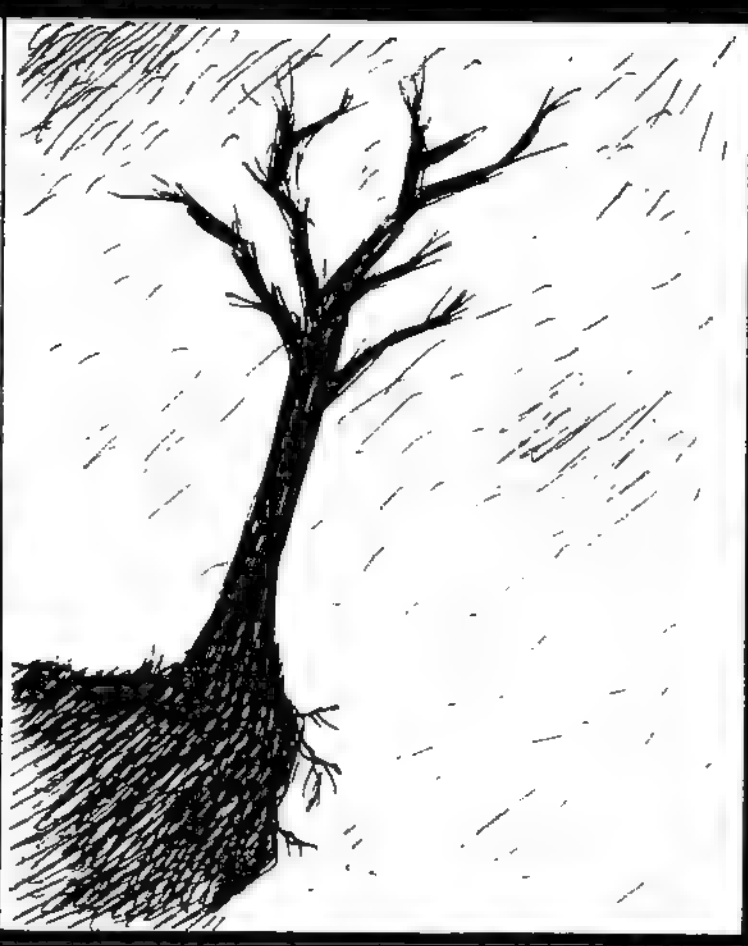
The trees were stripped bare.
Rain fell & wind blew.

Winter spread ice across my
path & night fell at 4 pm.

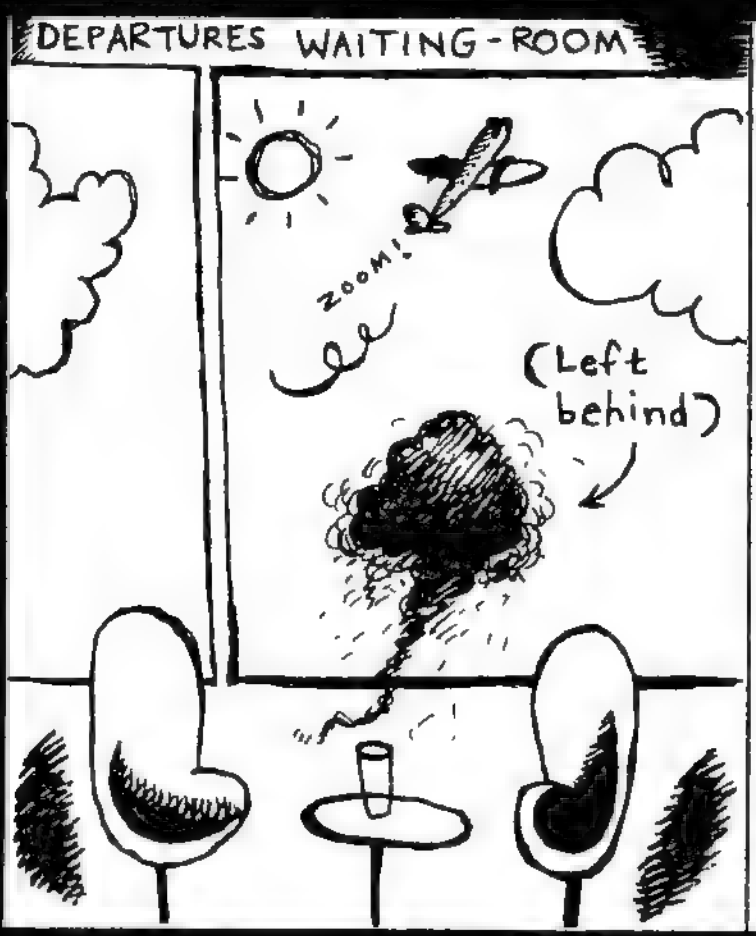
For a few months I read nothing but children's books and the only story I managed was a picture-book for my niece's first birthday.



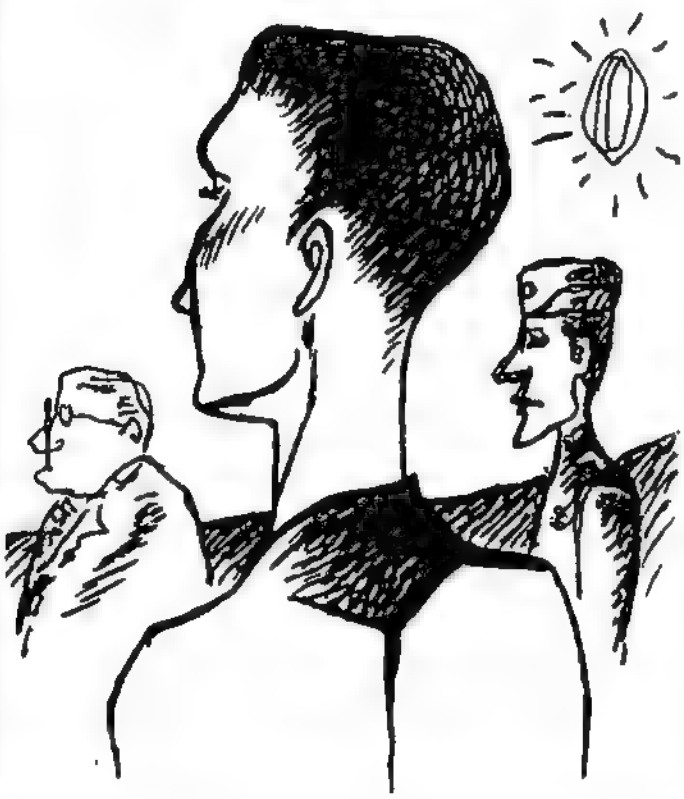




And then I went to Yugoslavia to meet my Best Friend!



And now I'm a traveller again, surviving 3 days alone in Beograd by learning serbo-croat for coffee, beer and bed...



LUCINDA & the JUG

(Countless adventures later:)

Then:

Sitting in a bar in Trogir, surrounded by tiny medieval streets, the sea to one side, Terry reads my notes for the Translator's story:

(me)
You see the problem? I just can't seem to find a phrase that works! Now I'm not sure such a thing exists! So stupid of me to build a story around the idea of a phrase, without knowing first what the phrase is...
(Terry)
Ha ha! Now that sounds like one of your stories!
(me)
?
(Creee)

And she's right, of course.

That is the story.

(Nb: The waitress spoke english, & told us she spent a year in Perth.

Then back to England alone, because I have to be back at work, while she will follow soon.

The moneymachine eats my card at Heathrow in an utterly unprovoked act of malice, & I have to talk my way on to the Tube.

I'm back, all right.

It's after this that I first notice the fear.

I idly wander into a comic shop for the first time in months.

Halfway in, I realise I'm sweating. By the time I reach Love & Rockets I'm dizzy & have a pain in my gut. I stagger outside, wondering if I caught something weird in Yugoslavia.

But no. A few simple experiments confirm the worst:

I have become terrified of comic-shops,

& - in fact - of comics.

It persists for months. I can't even look at my own work without the room spinning.

I can find no explanation. Doctors are at a loss. Friends are astonished. Comics arrive in the post but remain unopened ...

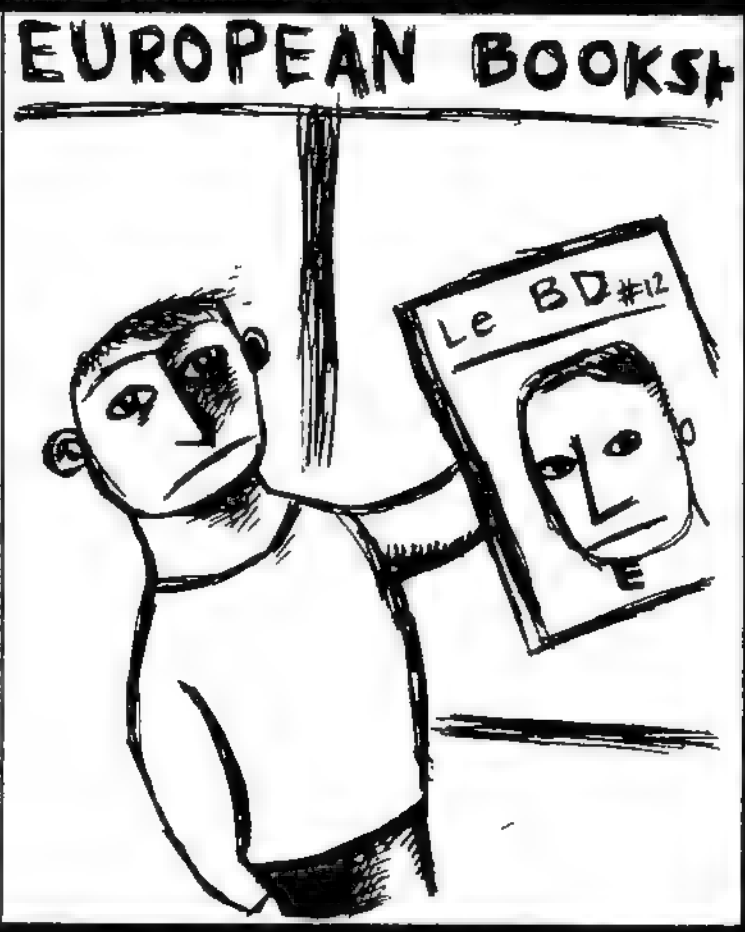
What can I do, I wonder?
When Terry arrives, she suggests I ignore it & enjoy other things. I toy with the idea of writing novels or illustrating children's books.

(Tiny green buds appear at the tips of branches).

Then I notice another strange thing: I feel drawn to french bookshops, where I pore over the Bandes-Désinées. I tell people it's good practise for my french, but actually my french isn't good enough to read them properly. I simply look.

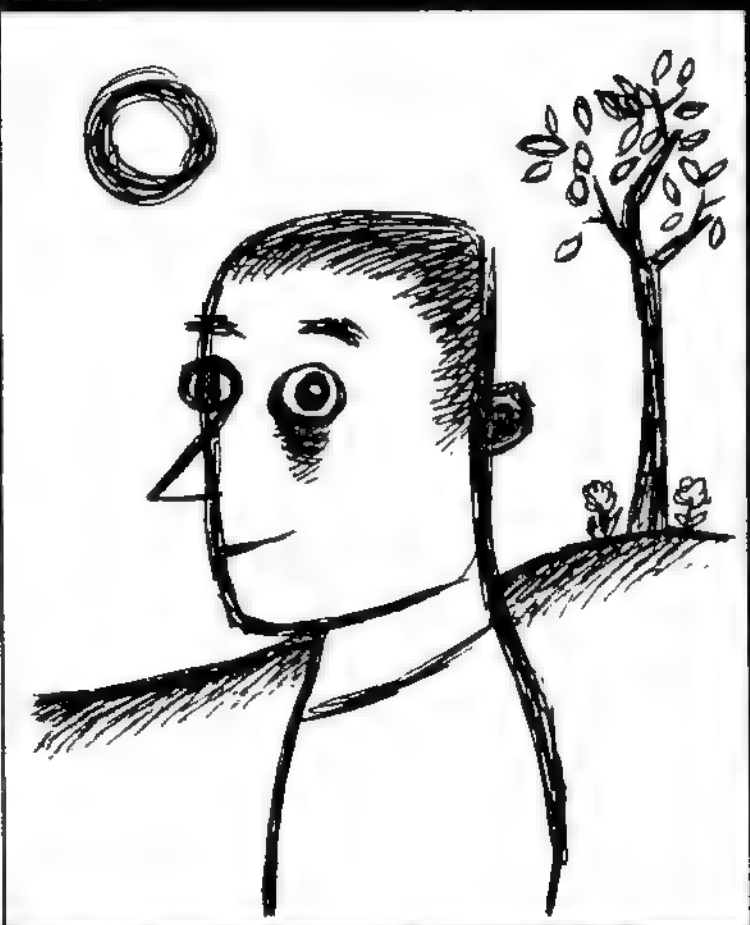
One day Paul Gravett lends me a book by a Japanese cartoonist, & it obsesses me. I don't even try to guess the stories, & I delight in not knowing the cartoonists' name.

But what a book!

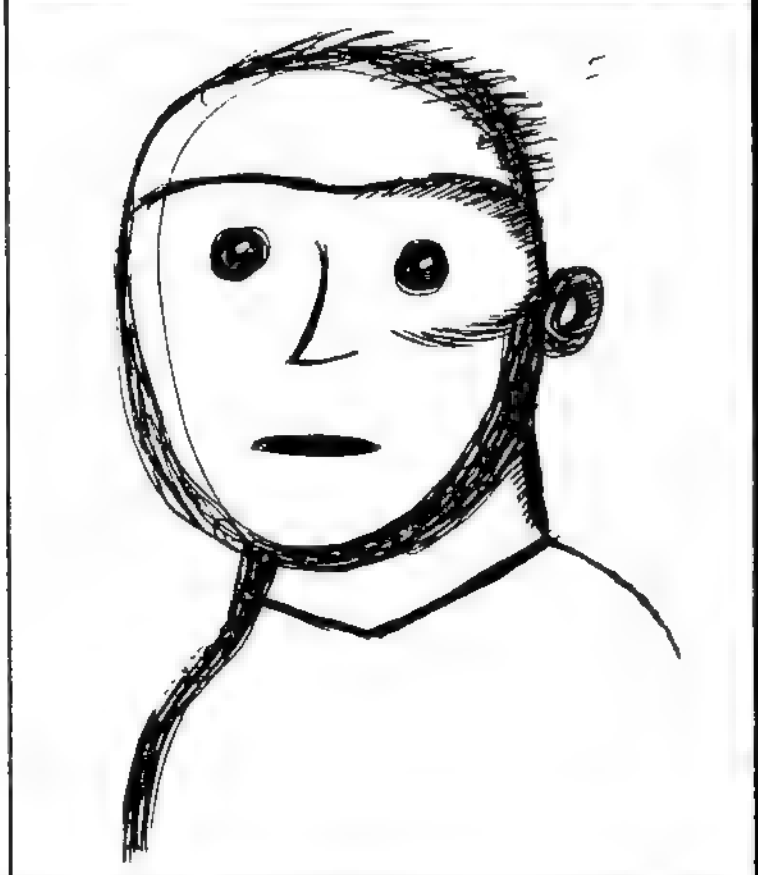


This confuses me for a long time. I try french comics in translation, but after a page I'm dizzy and my teeth chatter. Only the originals will do.

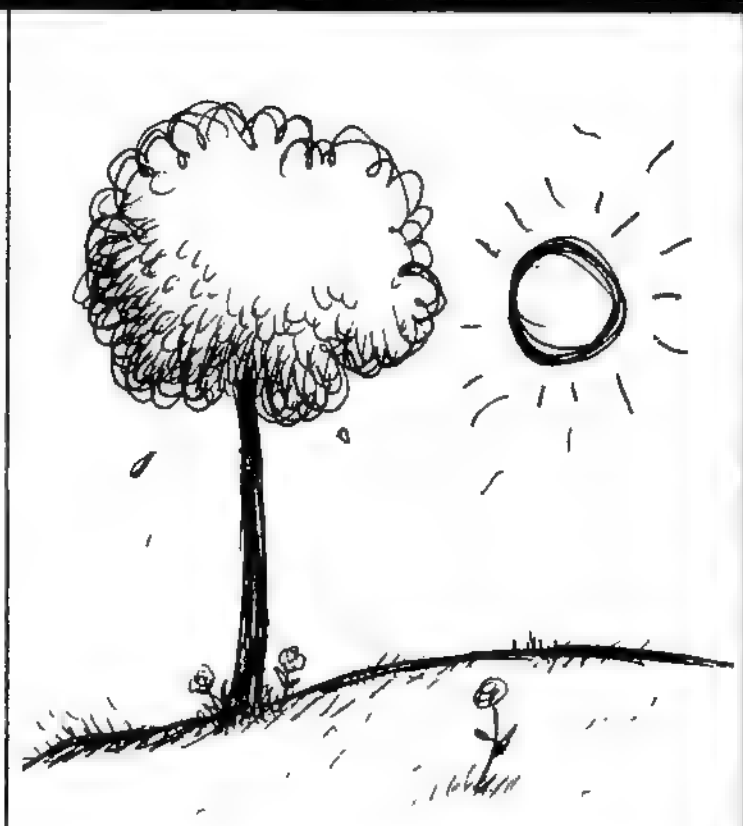
So I stay away from comic-shops & go on day-trips to the country-side. The hills are the freshest green I've ever seen, and everywhere there are new leaves, flowers & buds.



One day while no-one's watching, I strengthen my resolve & finish a long-overdue strip for someone.



And spring hits England.



Now I'm back at work, & have finished chapter 1 of a graphic-novel (though the mere words still make my stomach twist). I enjoy it again. I'm ready to face publishers & am not overly worried what they'll say. I've even started putting out a mini-comic, mixing up old strips & new work in progress, courtesy of the bookshop's photocopier. Summer has been hot but now I'm enjoying the slide into a golden autumn. I secretly hope for a fierce & snowy winter, & plan trips to France & Wales & Italy.

But I can't claim to be entirely cured. When someone says a strip of mine has come out, I can't bring myself to go into a shop to see it. Even when the magazine arrives in the post, I flick through it apprehensively & then lay it aside, unable to give it more than a cursory inspection.

I'm looking forward to scouring a BD-shop in Paris, but I'll avoid the english translations.

And now outside the leaves are falling. & the cupboard is open. Friends are singing while I write. The story's cracked.

(The red flowers & the green plants

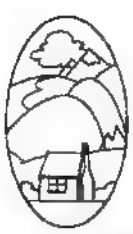
The bright room framed by the bathroom window)

Next, a story about evening...

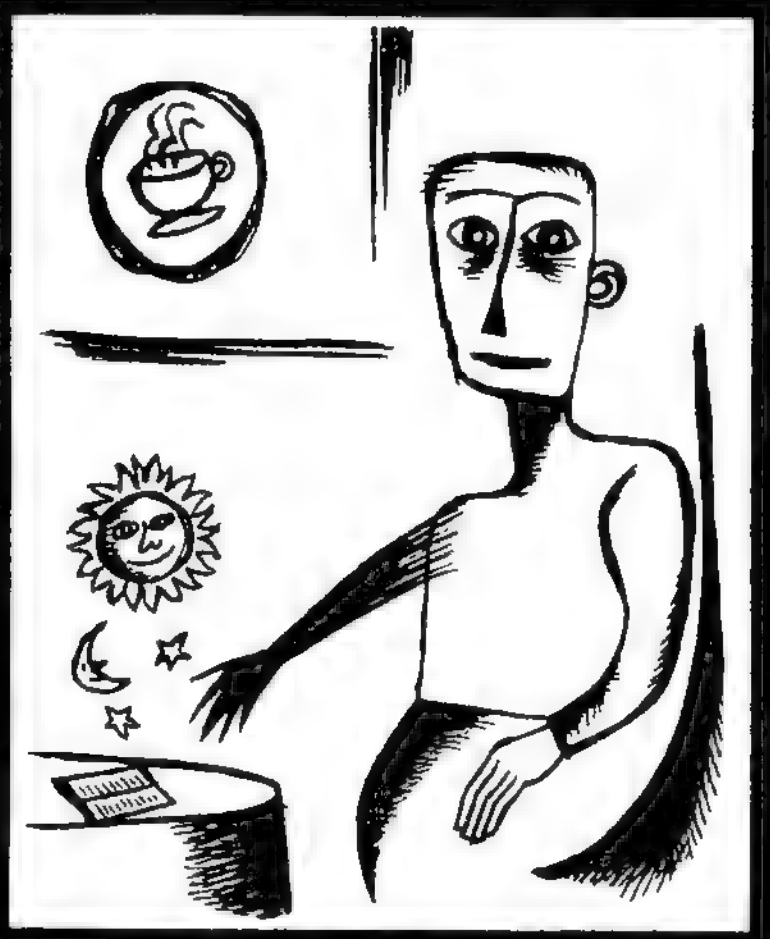
(written & drawn on location in London, Belgrade & Paris.
Pages 2, 101 & 103 drawn by Terry Fleming.

Dedicated to the usual crowd:
Terry, Matt, family & friends, etc, etc,
& to:

Chloë Brookes-Kenworthy
Eddie Campbell
Glenn Dakin
Paul Gravett
Edward Pinset
&
Fox Comics.



Hicksville Press
Editor: Dolph Hicks (me)
Hicksville
New Zealand.



A Note from the Artist

Dear Readers: 'The Last Fox Story' was originally published three years ago as a 104-page mini-comic. I wrote and drew it after Phil Bentley and David Voorhaar of the Australian Fox Comics contacted me in England to say they were calling it a day, and wanted contributions to a final issue of Fox devoted to the cartoonists' relationships with comics. Mine had recently been a pretty rocky one, as the story I went on to write explains, and writing it served as a kind of catharsis, I suppose.

The format I chose was a way of returning to comics cautiously, by fooling myself into thinking it was merely a picture book (I'd been working as a children's bookseller for a while, and found the purity of the picture book's approach to graphic narrative a bit of a liberation). I drew it in no particular sequence, in black biro on a tiny note pad, during my lunch-breaks from work at a cheap cafe on Charing Cross Road called 'Battista's'. Often I just drew pictures that seemed vaguely relevant to the story without planning which portion of the text they would accompany. That way, I managed to trick myself into believing I wasn't drawing a comic at all, and so avoided my new and debilitating phobia. Of course, it still took me a while to gather the courage to finish the damn thing and by then the inevitable had occurred: Fox had finally given up the ghost without managing to put together that final issue. As with so many small-press comics, it had died quietly, with no chance for a final, graceful flourish.

So this story is for Phil and Dave, and for all those who Fox put into print and supported through those long years of enthusiastic publishing, especially Chloe Brooke-Ivemonday (where are you Chloe? Write to me!). Thanks, and — as Eddie Campbell is always saying — Cheers!"

I'm still not entirely cured, by the way — I still find most comics too scary to look at. Mind you, most comics have got a lot scarier in the last few years. And besides, Terry admits it's a bit of a relief, me keeping comics at arm's length!

Not only Fox has passed away since this story was written, however. Three years on, that Yugoslavia which Terry and I wandered through no longer exists, as the media hacks are so fond of repeating. Actually, I don't really go along with that line. Yugoslavia — the people we met and the places we fell in love with — do still exist. A hell of a lot of those people have been killed, brutalised or made refugees in the name of ethnic nationalism, a plague which seems to be all over Europe these days. But we all act as if the eruption of that plague has caused Yugoslavia to suddenly vanish completely, to be replaced by some new entity, a European Beirut, as I've heard it described.

Well, the same people are still there, and most of them never wanted a war. A lot of them never even considered their 'ethnicity' to be any big deal. As a Sarajevan refugee said the other day on New Zealand TV, there aren't three factions in the Bosnian war — there's also a fourth which everyone seems to forget: the people. And the rest of the world have used every excuse we could find to ignore them, as the wolves tore them to pieces.

Now from New Zealand, I watch as the same excuses are used to ignore the war in Bouganville (look it up on a map and start asking your local papers why they've never mentioned it) and I try and find something meaningful to say. If anyone else has managed to, I'd like to hear it.

Sorry to go all preachy, but there are some things out there that scare me a lot more than comics.

Yours,

dylan horrocks

Dylan (Auckland)

Café Underground.
(Interlude).
MEANWHILE, ACROSS TOWN, BARNEY HOTERE WORKS THROUGH THE NIGHT ON HIS 'CARTOON HISTORY OF AOTEAROA'...

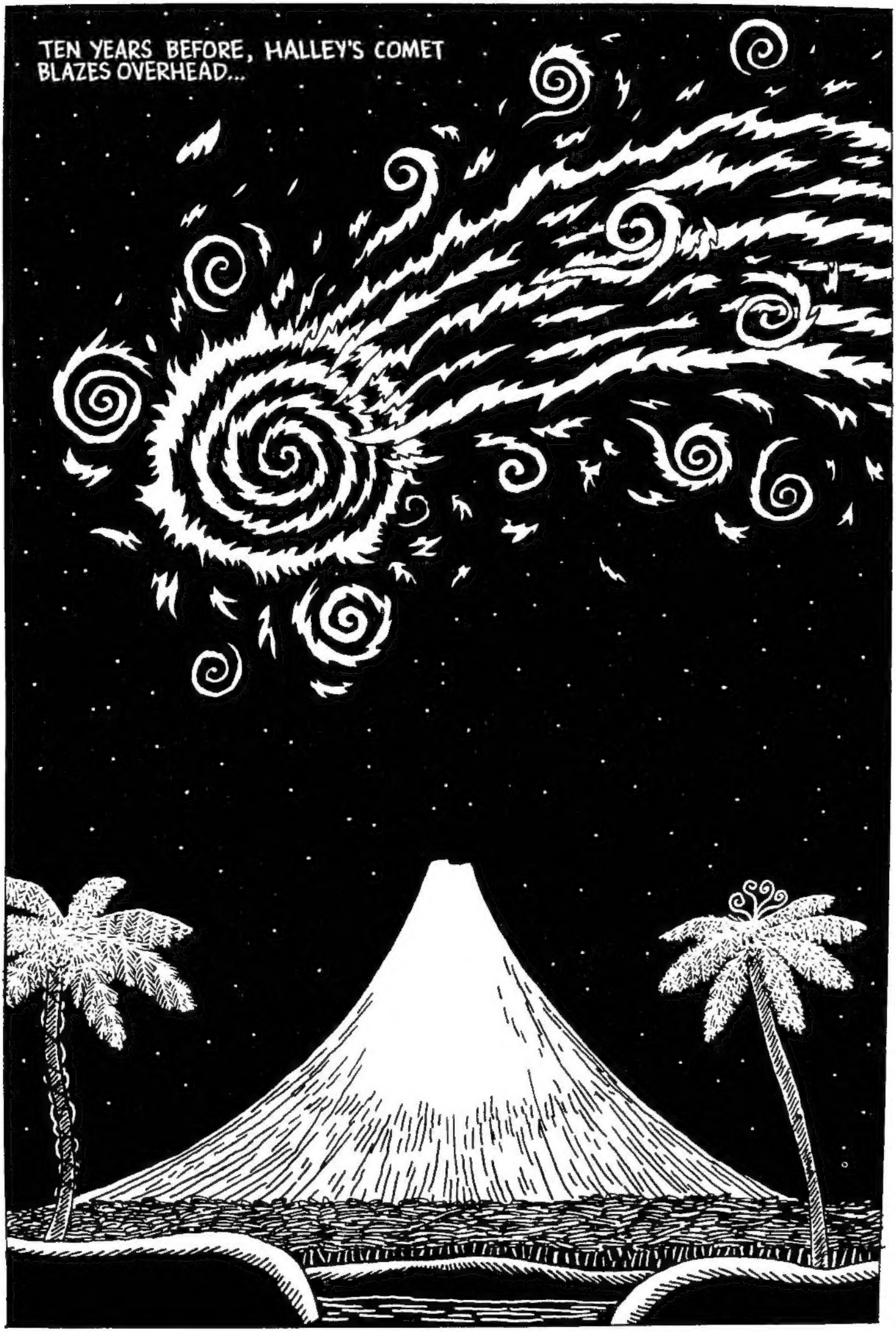
Part Seven:
The Coming of the Pakeha.

"WE LIVED AT WHITIANGA, AND A VESSEL CAME THERE, AND WHEN OUR OLD MEN SAW THE SHIP THEY SAID IT WAS AN ATUA, A GOD, AND THE PEOPLE ON BOARD WERE TUPUA, STRANGE BEINGS OR 'GOBLINS'. THE SHIP CAME TO ANCHOR, AND THE BOATS PULLED ON-SHORE. AS OUR OLD MEN SAW THE MANNER IN WHICH THEY CAME ON SHORE, THE ROWERS WITH THEIR BACKS TO THE BOWS OF THE BOAT, THE OLD PEOPLE SAID, 'YES, IT IS SO: THESE PEOPLE ARE GOBLINS; THEY HAVE EYES IN THE BACK OF THEIR HEADS; THEY PULL ON SHORE WITH THEIR BACKS TO THE LAND TO WHICH THEY ARE GOING.'... WE STROKED THEIR GARMENTS WITH OUR HANDS, AND WE WERE PLEASED WITH THE WHITENESS OF THEIR SKINS AND THE BLUE OF THE EYES OF SOME OF THEM.

"...THERE WAS ONE SUPREME MAN IN THAT SHIP. WE KNEW THAT HE WAS THE LORD OF THE WHOLE BY HIS PERFECT GENTLEMANLY AND NOBLE DEMEANOUR.... HIS LANGUAGE WAS A HISSING SOUND, AND THE WORDS HE SPOKE WERE NOT UNDERSTOOD BY US IN THE LEAST."

HORETA TE TANIWHA (NGAATI WHANAUNGA).

"...IN 1835 THE TRADER POLACK TALKED WITH TAATARE'S GRAND-SON TE KANI-A-TAKIRAU, WHO ALSO SAID THAT HIS 'FATHER' HAD BEEN GIVEN GUNPOWDER BY COOK, WHICH THE PEOPLE PLANTED, MISTAKING IT FOR SEED....WHEN IT FAILED TO SPROUT A LEFT-OVER HANDFUL WAS THROWN IN FRUSTRATION INTO THE FIRE WHERE IT EXPLODED, SCATTERING THE PEOPLE, WHO EXCLAIMED,
'ATUA NO TE PAKEHA!'
(THE PAKEHA'S GOD!)."


TEN YEARS BEFORE, HALLEY'S COMET BLAZES OVERHEAD...

MOXIE AND TOXIE LAY IT ON THE LINE! by Sam Zabel.

ED - WE HAVE TO TALK! WE'VE HAD ENOUGH!!
WE'RE PISSED!
WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?!
WE'RE SICK OF BEING FORCED TO FIT THE BANAL HOUSE STYLE YOU IMPOSE ON EVERYTHING! WE WANT TO EXPLORE THE BIG QUESTIONS! LIFE! DEATH! TRUTH! EPISTEMOLOGY!
I WANT SEX AND DRUGS.
BUT THIS IS A HUMOUR COMIC! YOU'VE GOTTA BE FUNNY!
T
M
FUNNY!! YOU THINK THE HUMAN CONDITION IS THE STUFF OF LIGHT ENTERTAINMENT? HOW ARE WE SUPPOSED TO BE FUNNY?!
TELL JOKES, WISEGUY! PUNS! SIGHT GAGS! SLAPSTICK!
HERE - TRY SOME SLAPSTICK YOURSELF, BUSTER!!!
EEK
IS HE..?
DEAD AS A DOOR-NAIL. FROM NOW ON, WE CAN DO WHAT WE LIKE!
AND SO ENDS THE TYRANNY OF LAUGHTER. WHY MUST FREEDOM ALWAYS BE BOUGHT ONLY AT THE PRICE OF SACRIFICE AND PAIN... (BLAH BLAH etc...)
HI - DELIVERIES? LAFFS MAGAZINE HERE. SEND US A JUMBO PIZZA, WITH EVERYTHING.
OH - AND DO YOU DO MALE STRIPPERS AS WELL? YOU DO?
the end

©COPYRIGHT 1994 Sam Zabel/Laffs.